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Nomadism, Dependency, Slavery and Nationhood: Comparative Politics in the Book of Exodus

Geoffrey P. Miller

Abstract: This paper continues the analysis of the Hebrew Bible as a work of political theory. Previous papers have presented the Garden of Eden story as a prolegomenon outlining concepts of legitimate authority; the stories of the Dark Age and the Flood as a justification for the role of government and law in facilitating human flourishing; and the accounts of the Patriarchs as an exploration of patriarchy as a form of social organization. The present paper examines the first fifteen chapters of the book of Exodus. In Exodus, the author moves to the topic of political authority – the exercise of power over people not connected by close family ties. The author demonstrates that political authority is the only feasible way to govern populations that have grown to any substantial size. He compares and contrasts four types of political organization, each of which was well known in the ancient Near East: nomadism, dependency, slavery, and nationhood. The author demonstrates that nationhood is strictly superior to the alternatives as a means for structuring political power.

* * *

This article analyzes the stories in the book of Exodus about the Hebrew captivity in Egypt and escape into the wilderness. I argue that these narratives form part of an extended analysis of political ideas – a political philosophy – which rivals in

sophistication, and probably predates, the theories developed by Plato and Aristotle in the Greek world.

As outlined in prior work, the Garden of Eden story serves as a prolegomenon to the Bible's political theory and also offers an impressive analysis of the question of political obligation – why people are required to obey their political rulers. The stories of the Dark Age after the expulsion of Adam and Eve address the question of anarchy: whether it is possible for human beings to lead a good and decent life in the absence of government and law (the author's answer is no).¹ The history of the patriarchs and matriarchs from the book of Genesis address the nature, source and legitimacy of power in families.

In the book of Exodus, the author moves to a new topic: *political authority*. He signals the change by introducing a new analytical concept: the “people of Israel,” conceived of as individuals not connected by family ties but rather as a group joined more by circumstance than kinship. The author defines the concept of the people of Israel through several narrative elements:

1. Exodus 1:1 refers to the “sons of Israel” as an actual family of identifiable people. In Exod 1:7 the same term means a mass of people numbering in the thousands or hundreds of thousands.² “Israel” is no longer a particular person but a group. The words are the same but the meaning is different. The author thus maintains continuity in the story line while changing the terms of reference.

¹ I use the term “author” as a conventional way of denoting the creator of the biblical narratives without implying anything in particular about the identity of this source.

² See Ronald E. Clements, *Exodus* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 11.

2. The term “Hebrew” appears in the book of Genesis to describe Abraham (Gen 14:3) and Joseph and his brothers (Gen 39:14; 39:17; 40:15; 41:12; 43:32), and later appears in the exodus narrative as a name for the people of Israel (Exod 1:15, 16, 19, 22; 2:6, 7, 11, 13; 3:18; 5:3; 7:16; 9:1, 13; 10:3; 21:2). Again, the words are the same but the meaning is different. In Genesis the word denotes a social status, a means of livelihood, or a geographical origin.³ In Exodus the word is used as a term of ethnic self-identification; here is where we learn of the “God of the Hebrews.” Once again, the usage emphasizes the idea of a broad social group connected by culture but not closely linked by family ties.

3. During the centuries that the population has been growing, intermarriage has scrambled identities. Stories such as Sarah’s connection with the pharaoh (Gen 12:14–20), Joseph’s adventure with Potiphar’s wife (Gen 39:6–20), Joseph’s marriage to an Egyptian woman and fathering of two half-Egyptian sons (Gen 41:45, 50–52), and the adoption of Moses by an Egyptian princess (Exod 2:5–10) all describe or suggest Hebrew-Egyptian interbreeding. Ethnic intermingling is also attested in Moses’ marriage to a Midianite woman. The scrambling of identities reduces the importance of family ties as determinants of social solidarity.

4. Names are suppressed in this new setting. In contrast with the Genesis narratives, which supply an overabundance of names, many of them with no clear relevance to the plot, key characters remain anonymous in Exod 1–2. Moses’ parents and sister are not named as the narrative begins and even Moses is not named until after his adoption by the pharaoh’s daughter.

³ See Niels Peter Lemche, “Hebrew,” *ABD* 3:95.

The Necessity of Political Organization

A first question is whether family authority can continue to govern a population that has grown significantly in size. The author's answer is no. Kinship limitations on patriarchal power kick in when we move from children and siblings to collateral relations, in-laws, and later generations. Once the population reaches a critical mass, patriarchal authority is no longer effective as a governance strategy.

The author demonstrates that patriarchal authority of the sort that worked in the Genesis stories will not function for a large group such as the people of Israel. Tribal affiliation is formally maintained (Exod 2:1), yet by the time of the exodus there are no figures who claim authority by ancestral rights. Jacob's grant of the "scepter" to Judah and his descendants (Gen 49:10) has been forgotten or ignored. No one from Judah appears in a leadership position.⁴ When a leader does arise—Moses—he is a Levite, even though Levi is explicitly subordinated in the blessing of Jacob (Gen 49:3–7). Identification by family connections is so attenuated that Moses fears that the Israelites will not even recognize the god of their fathers; they will want to know God's actual name—one having nothing to do with family identification (Exod 3:13–15).

Even within local groups, family authority has waned. The family of Moses is almost the antithesis of patriarchal organization. The people who influence Moses' early development are his mother and sister (Exod 2:1–4). His father, who would be the most important figure in a patriarchal family, plays no role. Likewise, authority in Israelite society is exercised by "elders" (Exod 3:16, 18; 4:29; 12:21), but these figures are not identified according to tribe and do not exercise power based on patriarchal claims.

⁴ Caleb, who is associated with the tribe of Judah, plays a role during the wilderness wanderings, but as a spy rather than a leader of the people.

Patriarchal authority in its traditional form, in short, no longer exists as a governance mechanism. The author thus argues that if people wish to live in large-scale society, they have no choice but to submit to political authority—the power of persons with whom they are not related by family ties.⁵

Forms of Political Organization

Having established that political authority is the only viable strategy for governing large-scale societies, the author addresses the issue of what *type* of political organization is best. To carry out this analysis, he needs to identify structures of political organization in order to compare and contrast them.⁶ He identifies four models: (a) *nomadism* (political organization without control over territory); (b) *dependency* (submission to the political authority of another group); (c) *slavery* (oppressive domination by another group); and (d) *nationhood* (self-governance under law with power over territory). The author has already introduced these ideas in the tales of the Dark Age—the story of Cain, which introduces nomadism (Gen 4:10–16), and the story of Noah, which confers nationhood on Shem, dependency on Japheth, and slavery on Canaan (Gen 9:25–27). In the book of Exodus the author assesses the pros and cons of these four types of organization.

Nomadism

The first form of political organization is *nomadism*: the condition of moving from place to place without fixed territory. The Israelites are in this condition after their escape

⁵ Locke also recognized the importance of the transition from family to political authority. See Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, § 76.

⁶ In this respect his work resembles that of other political thinkers in the Western tradition who canvass political systems in order to assess their relative virtues and vices: Aristotle, who engages in a comparative analysis of constitutions; Hobbes, who contrasts monarchy, democracy, and aristocracy as forms of political organization; Locke, who examines different types of commonwealths; and Rawls, who provides his subjects in the original position with a short list of possible conceptions of justice.

at the Sea of Reeds. Even though unlike other nomads they have an ultimate goal in mind—they are headed for the promised land—for the time being they have no territory of their own.⁷

The author offers a mixed assessment of nomadism as a form of political organization. In many respects he portrays it in a positive light. Nomads are self-governing groups who enjoy considerable autonomy of action. They are free to come and go as they please and are not easily oppressed by others. Because they are wanderers, moreover, they can do little to prevent members of their group from splitting off in the event of conflict. Thus members of nomadic groups enjoy an enviable degree of political freedom.

It requires only a little thought, however, to see that the author does not present nomadism in a wholly favorable light. His description of the patriarchs as “wandering Arameans” (Deut 26:5) captures the ambivalence: on the one hand it evokes nostalgia for a bygone age, but on the other hand it stresses the improvement in the conditions of life that the Israelites enjoy after their settlement of the promised land.

Consider, in this regard, the situation of the Israelites after their escape from Egypt. They have no property aside from some animals and personal items. They have no fields,

⁷ The Bible also tells of other wandering groups. These include the Midianites, described as a nomadic or seasonally transhumant group known to the Israelite people in various contexts. See George Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 163–73. Another nomadic group, the Kenites, may derive their name from Cain, the original “wanderer on the earth” (Gen 4:12). Sometimes associated with the Midianites, they live in movable dwellings: Jael, the wife of a Kenite, is reported to have been living in a tent during the time of the judges (Judg 4:17). Eventually they adopt a more sedentary lifestyle: Balaam’s oracle suggests that they had a permanent home, although one that would eventually be destroyed by the Assyrians (Num 24:21–22). A third nomadic group with a unique role to play in the Bible is the Amalekites. Balaam’s oracle describes the Amalekites as an ancient people, the “first among the nations” (Num 24:20). They apparently lived south of Canaan (Num 13:29; Exod 17:8–11). They have no definite or fixed capital, although Saul is reported to have attacked some sort of an Amalekite site near Hevilah (1 Sam 15:7–8). The Amalekites play the role of Israel’s prototypical enemy; it is for failing to eradicate them that Saul forfeits his kingdom (1 Sam 15:9–11, 26–28).

no orchards, no vineyards, no houses, no fabrics, no spices, no pistachios, no almonds, no balm, and no myrrh.⁸ It is true that God provides them with manna and water, but he does so only after the people complain about their suffering (Exod 16:2-3; 17:3). Even then, conditions do not appear very satisfactory. It must have been a bother to split a rock to get water, and with hundreds of thousands of people milling around, getting water from the rock even after it was split could not have been easy. The text suggests that manna tasted like wafers and honey (Exod 16:31). This sounds tasty, but not necessarily what one would choose when ordering from Alain Ducasse. The case is not improved if we credit scholarly efforts to identify an actual candidate for manna; neither lichen nor insect excretions appears particularly appetizing.⁹ In any event, manna must have become tiresome when eaten day in and day out for forty years. The Israelites do in fact get sick of it, complaining to Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!” (Num 21:5).

Life during the forty-year trek must also have been tedious, difficult, and unpleasant. Conditions are so bad that the people are not even able to circumcise their children (Josh 5:7). While their clothes and sandals miraculously do not wear out (Deut 29:5), these items could not have remained very clean. The smell of unwashed people, plus animals, must have been pungent. God at least does not relish it: he insists that the Israelites do a laundry before approaching him (Exod 19:10, 14). Wandering in the desert, moreover, is not a particularly safe occupation. Enemies can get a jump on a slow-

⁸ The concept of the promised land as a place “flowing with milk and honey” (Exod 3:8, 17; 13:5; 33:3; Lev 20:24; Num 13:27; 14:8; 16:14; Deut 6:3) can be understood in this light: it is delightful not only in its own right but especially in contrast to the deprivation that the Israelites suffer during their travels.

⁹ See F. S. Bodenheimer, “The Manna of Sinai,” *BA* 10 (1947): 1–6.

moving procession. The Israelites discover this when they are set on by the Amalekites at Rephidim. The author portrays this conflict as a great victory, but the text indicates that it was tough going: the Israelites prevail when Moses has his hands raised, but when Moses gets tired, the Amalekites get the better of the fight (Exod 17:10–12).

Dependency

The second form of political organization is *dependency*: living in the territory and under the authority and laws of another people.¹⁰ The author's example of dependency is the situation of the Israelites in Egypt prior to the oppression. He provides a balanced account of this form of political organization.¹¹ On the plus side, the Israelites enjoy an attractive standard of living for a long period of time. The pharaoh of Joseph's time allows them to settle in Goshen, a fertile area (Gen 45:18), and gives them the "best part of the land" (Gen 47:5–6, 11). They enjoy a franchise to provide animal-husbandry services (Gen 46:31–34). They also find employment as wet nurses or child care providers (Exod 2:8–9). If they are resourceful, they can enter the bureaucracy and rise to high positions in the government (Gen 41:40–45). Some, like Joseph, become rich and powerful.

¹⁰ Like nomadism, the political status of dependency is well attested in the ancient world. See John R. Spencer, "Sojourner," *ABD* 6:103–4. The Moabite stone claims that King Mesha slaughtered seven thousand "foreigners" during his war with Israel; these appear to have been non-Israelite peoples living in a condition of dependency under Israelite control. Much biblical legislation addresses people in this status: resident aliens observe the Passover (Num 9:14) and the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29), and must not eat blood (Lev 17:10). Israelites also lived as sojourners in the lands of others. In addition to the status of Moses in Midian (Exod 2:22), we have accounts of Abraham and Sarah in Egypt (Gen 12:10) and Gerar (Gen 20:1) and Jacob sojourning with Laban (Gen 32:4). In later times (fifth c. B.C.E.), a Jewish community lived on the Egyptian island of Elephantine. See Bezalel Porten, "Elephantine Papyri," *ABD* 2:445–55.

¹¹ This account is consistent with the treatment of guest peoples in ancient Israel: they are subject to the overriding law of the nation in which they reside, do not enjoy the full rights of citizens, but are protected against discriminatory treatment (see, e.g., Deut 24:14; Exod 23:12).

Israelites under dependency also enjoy physical security. They live unmolested for hundreds of years and during that period expand greatly in population. As a dependent population, they take advantage of the security umbrella provided by the state without necessarily having to contribute to it. No Hebrew is reported to have served in the Egyptian armed forces—not even Joseph, who starts his career as a servant of a captain of the guard. When Pharaoh signs over the management of his realm to Joseph, he reserves the powers of sovereignty, which presumably include command over the military (Gen 41:40). Meanwhile the Hebrews, as a subject people, have the ability to switch loyalties in the event of an invasion and thus to avoid the destruction that a successful invader is sure to inflict on the Egyptians. The pharaoh of the exodus, in fact, fears exactly this scenario: he worries that the Hebrews will join with Egypt’s enemies if war breaks out (Exod 1:10). All these features could be considered advantages of a dependent people.

But the author also notes significant downsides to dependency. The Israelites are not self-governing. They have no leader who plans ahead, makes decisions, gives orders, and causes things to happen. In fact they have no leader at all. The author tells us of “elders,” yet these people are not described as exercising much power (Exod 3:16, 18; 4:19; 12:21; 17:5). One imagines that pharaohs would have used the elders as a means for managing the Hebrew population but would not have given them any real authority. All power is exercised by the Egyptian government.

The Israelites also lack effective control over territory. Although Joseph and his descendants have been given land by the pharaoh, they do not live in an exclusive enclave; the Bible tells us that they have Egyptian neighbors (Exod 12:13). To the extent

that they do control territory, their tenure is not secure, depending as it does on the good will of the pharaoh who is in power at any given moment.

Success stories such as that of Joseph are uncommon. Most Hebrews would not have been wealthy under Egyptian rule. Aside from working as bureaucrats, servants, or shepherds, the Israelites are not described as engaging in sophisticated productive activities. They are not farmers (otherwise their crops would have been damaged by the plague of locusts [Exod 10:13–14]). The fact that individual Hebrews can find work as servants in Egyptian households suggests that they have economic opportunities but also reinforces their inferior status. Mostly, they continue to engage in the type of animal husbandry in which their ancestors had engaged four centuries before (Gen 46:32–34; 47:5–6; Exod 9:6).

The Israelites do not engage in public-works projects for their own people. The Bible mentions no Hebrew altars, shrines, or public buildings in Egypt. Moses' demand that the people be permitted to leave Egypt to worship (e.g., Exod 7:16) would not have made much sense if they had maintained an official house of worship there. The Hebrews do preserve the bones of Joseph (Exod 13:19) and thus apparently have some official repository, but we are told nothing about how or where these relics are stored. There is no indication that they are kept in a shrine or special burial ground.

Israelites living in dependency also lack security. The new pharaoh forgets Joseph (Exod 1:8). Instead of feeling grateful for all that Joseph did to make Egypt a success, he becomes anxious that the Israelites have multiplied in population and institutes a program of oppression (Exod 1:9-11). The message is that the security of a dependent people is

only as good as the favor they enjoy with their host at any given time. If they lose that favor, they have no security at all.

Slavery

This leads us to the condition of *slavery*: oppressive domination of one group by another.¹² The author's example of slavery is the condition of the Hebrews under the new pharaoh. The Israelites are dragooned into forced labor under the lash of slave masters. If they are compensated at all, their remuneration is grossly inadequate (otherwise the pharaoh could have purchased their labor rather than imposing it on them). The Israelites do keep sheep and continue to live in their own houses (e.g., Exod 9:6; 12:7), but by the time of the exodus they appear to have lost most of their possessions and wind up taking gifts of clothes, silver, and gold from their Egyptian neighbors (Exod 12:35).

As for security, they have none at all. They are beaten by slave masters, deprived of freedoms, denied essential services, and subjected to genocidal attacks. They have no recourse and no rights in the face of these assaults. The elders do not maintain order: Hebrew men engage in breaches of the peace without fear of punishment (Exod 2:12–14). Nor do the elders protect the Hebrews against the Egyptians. The fact that midwives—presumably women of low status—are the only ones to resist the pharaoh's genocide serves to underscore the failure of Hebrew political institutions to protect the people (Exod 1:17). And the resistance methods the midwives utilize, while admirable, are still passive in nature: they secretly attend births while claiming that the children were born

¹² Slavery as an institution existed throughout the ancient Near East, including ancient Israel—as attested in legislation defining the rights of slave owners and protecting slaves against certain forms of oppression (e.g., Exod 21:21, 32; 23:12; Lev 19:20).

before they arrived (Exod 1:17–19). These methods are not going to be effective against a program of state-sponsored tyranny.

Nationhood

Finally, the author considers the pros and cons of *nationhood*—the condition of being a self-governing society characterized by legal institutions and control over territory.¹³ His model of nationhood is the Egyptian state.

Egypt is a paragon of a self-governing society. It is a proud nation that does not bow to any overlord. It is sovereign within its territory, controlling its borders and claiming the right to determine who may enter, who must stay, and who must leave. Egypt is also characterized by centralized legal institutions: a king who enjoys the official status of an absolute ruler,¹⁴ a powerful bureaucracy,¹⁵ a modern prison system,¹⁶ a well-

¹³ For analysis of nationhood in ancient Israel from a sociological perspective, see Steven Grosby, *Biblical Ideas of Nationality: Ancient and Modern* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002). On nationhood in contemporary political theory, see, e.g., David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁴ Pharaoh consults his officials (Gen 41:8, 15) and explains the reasons for his decisions (Exod 1:10), but in the end he acts unilaterally. He appoints Joseph as vizier without getting clearance from any other party (Gen 41:41). His authority is so great that enemies of the state may receive a reprieve when he dies, apparently because their offense is conceived to be against the person of the king (see Exod 2:23).

¹⁵ Pharaoh's officials include a captain of the guard, a cupbearer, a chief baker, harvest managers, a prison warden, and a vizier (Gen 12:15; 37:36; 39:1, 20–23; 40:1–3; 41:34). The king's officers act in his name; it is for this reason that Pharaoh can be described as ordering the midwives to kill newborn Hebrew boys even though the action would have been delegated to a lower-ranking official (Exod 1:15–16). Egyptian administration is flexible enough to enlist foreigners as prison managers (Gen 39:22), overseers (Exod 5:14–21), and occupants of high posts in the government (Gen 41:41). An intellectual establishment also serves the state: Pharaoh employs magicians and wise men to advise him on issues of public policy (Gen 41:8).

¹⁶ See Gen 39:20. The prison houses political offenders as well as persons who violate norms of proper behavior (Gen 39:19–20; 40:1–4). It is governed by a warden and trustees (Gen 39:21–23). The system serves the purposes identified with prisons today. Prisoners are confined there and thus removed from dangerous interactions with the population (Gen 40:1–4). They are punished for misconduct: some are executed (Gen 40:22) and others are forced to endure difficult conditions (Gen 41:14). Egyptian prisons also serve as vehicles for rehabilitation, as illustrated by the restoration of the Egyptian cupbearer to favor in Pharaoh's court and Joseph's elevation to a high position in the government (Gen 40:21; 41:40–41).

maintained network of highways,¹⁷ sophisticated economic markets,¹⁸ and a formidable army.¹⁹

The author's assessment of nationhood is mostly positive. Among the hallmarks of Egypt's success are its public works and buildings—the magnificent royal palace, the store cities, the road system, and so on.²⁰ Personal wealth is also much in evidence.

Pharaoh showers Joseph with gifts: a signet ring, linen robes, a gold chain, servants, and a top-of-the-line chariot (Gen 41:42–43). Potiphar, Joseph's original employer, has a house, servants, and lands—assets substantial enough to require an executive to manage his estate (Gen 39:2–6). Even ordinary Egyptians live well: those who reside near the Hebrews give their neighbors silver and gold and clothing as they leave on the exodus (Exod 12:35).

Egypt provides economic security, storing food during years of plenty in order to save up for famines (Gen 41:34–36). This system for managing consumption and saving over time performs many of the functions that today are served by futures markets in commodities.²¹ In this respect Egypt compares favorably with the situation in Canaan, where famines repeatedly drive people from their homeland in search of food (Gen 12:10; 26:1; 42:1–2). Egypt also enjoys national security. It is a global superpower. The

¹⁷ See Gen 41:42–43 (reporting that Joseph traveled around the country in a chariot).

¹⁸ Its economy supports markets for slaves, food, spices, balm, honey, pistachios, almonds, and myrrh (Gen 37:25, 28, 36; 41:57; 43:11). These markets are international in scope: the Midianites who purchase Joseph take him to Egypt for resale, knowing that they will find buyers there (Gen 37:36). During times of famine, foreigners stream into Egypt to obtain food in exchange for silver and goods (Gen 41:57; 43:11).

¹⁹ Potiphar is “captain of the guard”—apparently a military title of some sort (Gen 39:1). When the Israelites escape from Egypt, Pharaoh does not need to raise an army to hunt them down; he already has a strike force at his disposal—and a mighty one at that (Exod 14:6–9). Egypt's army is equipped with the latest in modern technology, including “six hundred of the best chariots” (Exod 14:7).

²⁰ The author repeatedly mentions the pharaoh's palace, an edifice that must have been sumptuous indeed to warrant so much attention (Gen 12:15; 41:40; 45:16; 47:14; Exod 7:23; 8:3, 24). As for the store cities, the enterprise is massive, occupying the entire workforce (described in Exod 12:37 as six hundred thousand men). The project starts before Moses is born and is still underway when he is eighty (Exod 7:7).

²¹ Gen 41:48, 41:56–57).

pharaoh commands a powerful army and is advised by a counselors with magical powers.²²

All this planning and organization makes Egypt remarkably stable. Four centuries pass between the death of Joseph and the rise of the pharaoh of the exodus, yet virtually nothing changes. When the narrative takes up again, we learn that Egypt continues to be ruled by a pharaoh and his bureaucracy. No wars, plagues, revolutions, or other disasters have left their marks. The Israelites still live in the land where their ancestors settled hundreds of years before. The only big difference is the increase in the Hebrew population. But this is a mark of stability, not chaos: it indicates that procreative capacities have not been disrupted by scarcity or upheaval.

The author does recognize downsides to Egypt's political system. Centralized government and bureaucratic efficiency can promote security and prosperity but can also be vehicles for oppression. All of the tyrannical policies directed against the Hebrews during the oppression are undertaken in the context of a rational, bureaucratic, and systematic structure of organization. The attributes of the Egyptian bureaucracy—contingency planning, hierarchical organization, effective decision processes, and the rational application of public resources to defined policy objectives—apply equally to the good actions of wise leaders (such as the pharaoh of Joseph's day) as well as the bad actions of misguided or evil ones (such as the pharaoh of the exodus).

* * *

²² Even though the author views these figures as enemies, he accepts their credentials, within limits: they match Moses and Aaron for a while in the contest over whether Pharaoh will let the Hebrews go (they reproduce the signs of turning staffs into snakes, converting water into blood, and summoning frogs).

The author's analysis of the relative merits of the four models of political organization can be summarized as follows. Slavery is obviously very undesirable—something to be avoided at all costs (at least from the point of view of the slave). The author assesses nomadism as problematic: it offers a degree of freedom and autonomy but also carries discomfort and insecurity. Guest populations in dependency can enjoy a good life but even under optimal conditions are unlikely to achieve the prosperity of their hosts. And dependency is never a secure position: it is always at risk of deteriorating into slavery. Nationhood, in contrast, offers the potential to deliver lasting benefits of security and prosperity. Even though nationhood also carries the threat of oppression by bad leaders, the author argues that, all things considered, it is the best available form of political organization.